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Soviets may have 8 crates of U.S. computer equipment, officials say

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WASHINGTON — Eight giant crates of sophisticated U.S.-made computer equipment have disappeared, perhaps into the hands of the Soviet Union, U.S. officials disclosed Monday.

The information came to light in a backhanded way at a press conference called by Treasury Secretary Donald Regan and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger to show off 10 tons of computer equipment successfully recovered by the U.S. Customs Service with help from West Germany and South Africa. Neither said anything about the missing shipments.

"I am pleased to announce today that one of this nation's most sensitive computer systems is now back in our hands and not on its way to the Soviet Union," said Regan, pointing to a Digital Equipment Corp. VAX 11-782 that was seized Nov. 9 in Hamburg, Germany, and returned Friday to the United States.



Regan

The \$1.5-million computer, used for missile guid-

ance systems, military systems design, simulation of radar networks, war gaming and a host of other military purposes, "was an illegal and dangerous shipment to the Soviet Union," Weinberger added.

But it soon became clear the real purpose of the press conference was to pressure Sweden into returning to the United States four more crates of the same shipment, which U.S. officials believe may include another VAX 11-782. ~~The Swedes have been noncommittal because of their traditional hesitancy to irritate the Soviets, who played on this fear Monday by calling the Swedes "errand boys for the CIA."~~

The Swedish connection was old news, but a remarkable new disclosure came from Customs Service official William Rudman after Weinberger and Regan had left. Rudman said that 15 shipments altogether had left the United States for South Africa, apparently on the first leg toward the Soviet Union — and that the four in Sweden and the three seized in Hamburg left another eight unaccounted for.

The huge crates weigh up to 10 tons each. U.S. officials said they have no idea what high technology equipment and secrets they contain.

Asked if the eight missing shipments could have contained other VAX 11-782s, Rudman shrugged and said, "It's possible..we just don't know." Was it possi-

ble that those eight crates could already be in Soviet hands? "Yes," answered Rudman.

Whatever the crates contain, their receipt by Russia

would be another coup for a German national and notorious West-East technology runner named Richard Mueller, who U.S. officials said masterminded the scam.